Jaroszynskis only two locals at Basel Fair

By NATALIE KNIGHT

ONCE a year the best 20th century art from all over the world is exhibited at the Basel Art Fair.

I visited the 9th International Art Fair recently and saw an incredible variety of creative activity.

Over 300 galleries each take a stall at the fair, some holding one-man shows and others exhibiting the work of several artists.

Paintings, sculpture, graphics and photography are on view.

An alphabetic cross-section of artists ranges from Agam, Bacon, Chagall, Dali, Ernst, and Fuchs, Moore and Miro, to Wunderlich and Zuniga.

The mind and imagination boggle at the quantity of the works.

There was far less avant garde art than I had expected, but apparently the real way-out expression is reserved for the fair in Bologna, held in November.

The purpose of this fair is not to shock: dealers tend to exhibit the best available works of artists of repute.

Prices have climbed consistently over the years and the President of Art 9 '78 says the fair stands under the banner of a visible upward trend in the art market.

Although the majority of artists exhibiting have used traditional materials there are always innovators: one artist showed his ingenuity by creating works of art out of broken egg shells glued together; another stuffed bits of clothing such as a shirt or stockings, and joined them in unexpected ways with disembodied parts floating around, another chose artificial hair as her medium.

The long strands of hair were plaited, twisted or combed out in various combinations of colour and texture.

The hair designs were then placed in rows and hung in frames made of perspex.

Sculptural materials included plaster cast moulds of small meditative dwarfs and a life size mobile elephant made of wire-mesh covered with plastic.

I looked carefully among the seemingly endless rows of stalls for some art from South Africa.

As I entered the stall of Gallery Romanet (based in Paris) I saw an oil by Karen Jaroszynska. The gallery owner pointed out the adjoining work, a brightly coloured abstract oil, as the work of Tadeusz Jaroszynski. I would not have recognised it.

Tadeusz has changed considerably after his stay in Sweden.

I was told his work had sold well in Basel, five out of six oils being purchased.

Karen had shown less work — she had been ill.

Gallery Romanet has entered a contract with the Jaroszynskis and is holding an exhibition of their work in Paris in November.

Karen and Tadeusz left South Africa at the beginning of 1977, after living and working in this country for 20 years.

After their success with Gallery Romanet they are moving to France where they will live for a while.

Tadeusz was very excited, saying: "It was quite amusing to see two country bumpkins from sunny South Africa and the outback of Sweden come to Paris and sell every single work.

"And it was the first place we walked into. This has secured our livelihood for a while so that we can continue to develop our work."

It was indeed gratifying to see how well these two artists held their own on the international art market.

The Jaroszynskis have exhibited previously in Basel in 1974 with the Lidchi Art Gallery and in 1975, with Gallery 21.

This year no South African galleries exhibited at Basel.